

**Written Testimony of Donna M. Butts
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**To the Subcommittee on Human Resources
Ways and Means Committee
U.S. House of Representatives**

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As an organization dedicated to improving the lives of children, youth, and older adults through intergenerational strategies, Generations United is pleased to have this opportunity to submit testimony about the Stephanie Tubbs Jones Child Welfare Services and Promoting Safe and Stable Families Programs (PSSF) to the Subcommittee on Human Resources of the Committee on Ways and Means. Generations United urges the committee to sustain and strengthen supports for children raised in “grandfamilies,” families headed by grandparents or other relative caregivers (also known as kinship families).

Generations United is the national membership organization that works to improve the lives of children, youth and older adults through intergenerational collaboration, public policies and programs for the enduring benefit of all. Founded in 1986 by the National Council on Aging, Child Welfare League of America, AARP, and Children’s Defense Fund, Generations United has served as a resource to policymakers and the public about the economic, social and personal imperatives of intergenerational collaboration since 1986. One of GU’s core initiatives is its National Center on Grandfamilies.

BACKGROUND ON GRANDFAMILIES

According to estimates from the American Community Survey more than 6.7 million children across the country are living in households headed by grandparents or other relatives.ⁱ The foster care system serves approximately 102,000 of these children.ⁱⁱ In fact, children raised in grandfamilies represent almost one-fourth of the children in foster care. For grandfamilies in foster care, the state generally has legal custody and caseworkers and judges can assist with access to services, such as school enrollment and the receipt of medical care.

However, the vast majority grandparents and other relatives raising children do not have a legal relationship with the children they care for – such as adoption, legal custody, or guardianship. Without the help of caseworkers and judges to ease the process, it is often very challenging for these grandfamilies to access many of the same services and resources. Furthermore children in these families are known to face additional hardships because their caregivers are more likely to be single, older, of poorer health, have more mental health programs and of lower economic status than traditional foster parents.ⁱⁱⁱ

Even in the face of these challenges these grandparents and other relatives step in to provide an invaluable safety net for children whose parents are unable to care for them for a variety of reasons including: military deployment, incarceration, mental or physical illness, death, and poverty. By doing so, “grandfamilies” keep families together in times of need and save taxpayers

an estimated least \$6.5 billion a year by preventing children from entering the foster care system.^{iv} In addition, research shows that children who remain in relative homes have better outcomes those living with non-relatives.^v

Despite the important role that millions of grandparents and other relatives play in caring for children outside of the formal foster care system, the vast majority of available supportive policies and services are targeted at supporting only those kinship families where the caregivers are licensed foster parents or otherwise involved with the formal child welfare system. The following recommendations address how The Promoting Safe and Stable Families Program can reduce barriers for these grandfamilies not involved with the formal system to allow the caregivers to access services and resources necessary to provide for the children for whom they care.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Identify, Evaluate, and Promote Evidence-Based Programs Serving Grandfamilies, or Kinship Families.

Research shows that children placed with relatives fare better than children placed with non-related foster families. Children in relative foster care placements as compared to those in non-relative foster care are: safe if not safer; more stable; more likely to remain with siblings; and more likely to stay connected to community and culture.^{vi}

While research on outcomes for children living in homes with relatives outside of the formal foster care system is limited, initial studies suggest these children have better outcomes than children in foster care.^{vii} Yet supportive programs and services are often critical to ensure children thrive. Support is needed to identify, evaluate and promote evidence-based practices in programs serving grandfamilies who are not connected to the formal foster care system. This could be accomplished through providing additional support for a national resource center to collaborate with other national nonprofits and leaders in the field of kinship care/grandfamilies to accomplish the following:

- Identify promising programs serving grandfamilies
- Conduct comprehensive evaluations of these promising programs to transform them into evidence based programs
- Collect and synthesize research on grandfamilies

When evidence-based models are identified, policymakers should invest in them and promote ways to encourage the field to take them to scale.

Provide Incentives for States to Provide Services and Support to Grandfamilies by Leveraging Current Resources And Promoting Interagency Collaboration

Generations United recommends that the Promoting Safe and Stable Families program provide incentives for states to use funds already available to grandfamilies. In periods of scarce resources, federal programs can better serve children and families by leveraging limited

resources across agencies. Policies that support grandfamilies have a unique opportunity to promote collaborations across funding streams and administrative agencies serving younger and older people. The National Family Caregiver Support Program (NFCSP), which is a part of the Older Americans Act and is administered by the Administration on Aging, allows up to 10 percent of its funds to be utilized for services and supports for grandfamilies in which the caregiver is 55 or older. Promoting Safe and Stable Families (PSSF) could encourage the full use of this funding by including language which provides incentives through guarantees of supplemental PSSF funds dedicated to serving grandfamilies thereby multiplying the NFCIP funds used to support the families.

The National Family Caregiver Support Program (NFCSP) provides funds to states to serve family caregivers in five categories of services: information to caregivers about available resources; assistance to caregivers in gaining access to the services; individual counseling, organization of support groups, and caregiver training; respite care; and supplemental services on a limited basis. States have the option to use up to ten percent of these funds to serve children and caregivers in families where grandparents or other relatives are raising children. While some states use the full allowable 10 percent of funds to serve these families. Others use only a small portion or none of the allowable amount of funds to serve these families. As a result child welfare agencies are left with fewer collaborative resources to better serve children and families at risk.

The National Family Caregiver Support program also limits the use of their funds to grandfamilies with caregivers ages 55 and over. Area Agencies on Aging report frequent requests from families with caregivers under the age of 55 seeking supports. Unless they have other funds without age restrictions, they are unable to serve these families. Blending NFCSP and PSSF funds would eliminate the age barrier.

Generations United recommends that the PSSF Program incentivize states to increase their NFCSP investments in programs that serve children in the care of grandparents or other relatives. Specifically PSSF should designate a portion of funds which would be dedicated to support grandfamilies in states that elect to use the full 10 percent of NFCSP dollars to serve grandfamilies. This approach would leverage resources from both the aging and children's communities, serving a population of mutual interest while resulting in a win-win for children and caregivers.

To further identify areas of potential synergy, an interagency planning team should be established to make recommendations to Congress on opportunities for further collaboration and leveraging of resources across agencies serving children, youth and caregivers.

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ⁱ U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2005-2009, Table B09006.

ⁱⁱ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau, the AFCARS Report Preliminary FY 2009 Estimates as of July 2010. Accessed April 14, 2011 at http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/stats_research/afcars/tar/report17.htm

ⁱⁱⁱ Ehrle J, Geen R, Main R. *Kinship Foster Care: Custody, Hardships, and Services*. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute; 2003; Brooks D, Barth R. Characteristics and outcomes of drug-exposed and non drug-exposed children in kinship and non-relative foster care. *CHILD YOUTH SERV REV*. 1998;20(6):475-501; Ehrle J, Geen R. Kin and non-kin foster care—findings from a national survey. *CHILD YOUTH SERV REV*. 2002;24(1):15-35; Timmer SG, Sedlar G, Urquiza AJ. Challenging children in kin versus nonkin foster care: perceived costs and benefits to caregivers. *Child Maltreat*. 2004;9(3):251-262.

^{iv} This figure was calculated based on the federal share of the 2000 average monthly foster care maintenance payment, which was estimated at \$545 in the Green Book committee on Ways and Means, U.s. House of Representatives. Half the children are used for our calculation due to a conservatives estimate that the other half already receive some type of governmental financial assistance, such as a Temporary Assistance for Needy Families child-only grant. Consequently the cost of one million children entering the system would represent all new financial outlays for taxpayers.

^v David M. Rubin et al., *Impact of Kinship Care on Behavioral Well-being for Children in Out-of-Home Care*, 162 *ARCHIVES FOR PEDIATRIC & ADOLESCENT MED*. 6 (June 2, 2008) available at <http://archpedi.ama-assn.org/cgi/content/full/162/6/550> ; Generations United (2007) *Time for Reform: Support Relatives in Providing Foster Care and Permanent Families for Children*.

^{vi} Generations United (2007) *Time for Reform: Support Relatives in Providng Foster Care and Permanent Families for Children*.

^{vii} Rubin David M. Rubin et al., *Impact of Kinship Care on Behavioral Well-being for Children in Out-of-Home Care*, 162 *ARCHIVES FOR PEDIATRIC & ADOLESCENT MED*. 6 (June 2, 2008) available at <http://archpedi.ama-assn.org/cgi/content/full/162/6/550>.